



EXTENSION

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Immune system tips offered

While medical researchers worldwide race to develop a cure for COVID-19, people can work to strengthen their immune systems and stay as healthy as possible, said Janice Hermann, Oklahoma State University Extension nutrition specialist.

A few easy and practical habits might make a big difference in the long run – emotionally as well as physically. “The immune system is actually made up of a network of cells, tissues and organs. Eating right, staying physically active, getting enough sleep and managing stress keeps everything in top working order,” Hermann said. “However, people are likely experiencing higher levels of stress, getting less sleep and perhaps not eating healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

A healthful diet has an important role in maintaining the immune system. Many different nutrients have a role in supporting a healthy immune system, including protein, beta-carotene, folate, iron, zinc, selenium, magnesium and vitamins A, C, B6 and D. However, too much of a good thing can create other problems. Focus on a well-balanced diet containing a variety of foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole-grains, low-fat dairy and lean protein following the USDA’s MyPlate (<http://choosemyplate.gov>) .

It is also important to engage in regular moderate physical activity in an effort to help keep the immune system strong. The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommends adults get at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate activity each week. Children ages 6 to 17 should get at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity every day.

Getting enough sleep and managing stress are also important for a healthy immune system. Not getting enough sleep, coupled with dealing with a lot of stress, can wear down a person’s body and weaken their immune system. Ideally, adults should get seven to eight hours of sleep each night, on average. However, some adults function just fine on six hours, while others may need up to nine hours of sleep.

“Today’s current situation is causing a lot of stress for people, which can take a toll both physically and emotionally,” Herman said. “Learning ways to reduce or manage stress is imperative for good health. Physical activity also plays a positive part in immune function by helping with stress management. If you have exercise equipment at home, use it. If not, go for a walk around your home or tune into an online exercise show to help deal with the stress you may be experiencing.”

For additional information, contact Kristy Spalding, Beckham and Washita Counties’ FCS Extension Educator, at 580-660-0592 or kristy.spalding@okstate.edu.

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